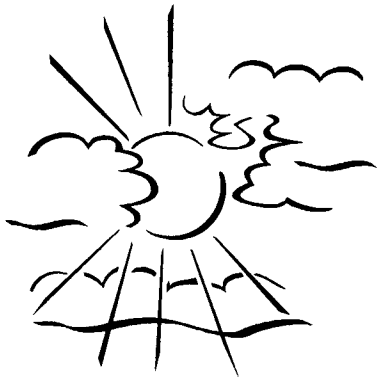


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(517) 373-7394**



**\*Important story at this spot**

# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Tuesday, December 20, 2005**

**(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)**

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Tuesday, December 20, 2005

## **Mom charged in baby's death**

### **In first-degree murder case, 9-month-old child's autopsy may lead to more charges for the Detroiter.**

David G. Grant and David Shepardson / The Detroit News

**DETROIT** -- Malik O'Neal's father went to jail when Malik was only 7 months old. He lived with his mother, grandmother and as many as eight other children in a home on Hickory, in northeast Detroit. Police said his mother complained that Malik wouldn't stop crying, no matter what she did.

Malik's life ended when he was 9 months old, and his mother was arraigned Monday on first-degree murder charges, accused of suffocating the child, whose remains were found Saturday in a garbage bag in the basement of his home, owned by his father's mother, Lillian Leak.

"This is a tragedy that has affected many lives family and friends, especially in this holiday season," said Detroit Police Homicide Sgt. William Anderson, who is in charge of the case. "I just hope that the family can get past this tragic event."

On Monday, Jessica O'Neal appeared via closed-circuit television in 36th District Court in Detroit for her arraignment on the first-degree murder charge in Malik's slaying.

Magistrate Renee R. McDuffee entered a not guilty plea on O'Neal's behalf and ordered her held without bond in the Wayne County Jail, pending a preliminary examination on the charge Dec. 29.

O'Neal, who police said has at least one other child, was unemployed and has not yet received a court-appointed attorney.

An investigator said family members reported the child had previous injuries that could lead to additional charges when the medical examiner completes the autopsy report.

Homicide investigators believe that Malik was suffocated on or before Dec. 8 -- the day Jessica O'Neal checked into St. John Hospital in Detroit complaining of low blood sugar.

She told hospital officials that her baby had been kidnapped and later changed her story to say that she had killed her baby, Anderson said.

When police first went to the home, they didn't find the baby. They again questioned O'Neal, who police said has admitted to the slaying.

"After talking with the mother, I think that we pretty much knew what happened to the infant," Anderson said. Police said she complained that he never stopped crying and that she couldn't get him to stop.

Both O'Neal and Milo Leak, Malik's father, graduated from Denby High School in 2004.

Milo Leak was arrested in a concealed weapons case and is being held at the Macomb County Jail, police said.

Detroit

## **Mom is charged in baby's death**

### **Detroit 9-month-old was discovered wrapped in plastic bag**

December 20, 2005

BY JACK KRESNAK  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The mother of a 9-month-old whose body was hidden in the basement of a house in northeast Detroit for more than a week was charged Monday with first-degree murder.

Jessica O'Neal, 21, is charged with smothering her baby, Malik O'Neal, on Dec. 8, wrapping his body in a blue plastic trash bag and hiding it in a cabinet in the basement.

O'Neal was arraigned by video late Monday before Magistrate Renee McDuffee in 36th District Court in Detroit.

The boy's grandmother, Lillian Leak, said she last saw Malik on Dec. 8 and noticed him missing the following day. Leak said when she asked O'Neal -- her son's girlfriend -- where Malik was, O'Neal claimed a friend was caring for him.

That went on for seven days until O'Neal left Leak's Hickory Avenue home on Dec. 15. She ended up at St. John Hospital in a diabetic medical crisis. O'Neal then told a doctor Malik was missing and may have been kidnapped.

When police arrived at the hospital and asked about the baby, O'Neal told officers: "I don't want to go to jail," according to a police report filed in district court.

Detroit Police Officer Irvan Higgins asked, "Why would you go to jail?"

She responded: "The baby would not stop crying and I had the pillow and he stopped breathing."

On Saturday, police found Malik's body in the basement of Leak's home near East 7 Mile and Schoenherr.

The boy's father, Milo Leak, has been in the Macomb County Jail on a concealed weapons charge for two months. His mother said he warned her that O'Neal might try to kill Malik. She said she'd also contacted child protective services in July and reported suspected abuse of Malik. Leak said investigators came to their home twice, but did not remove the child from O'Neal's care.

State officials declined to comment Monday on the case.

According to records in the juvenile division of Wayne County Family Court, O'Neal was a temporary ward of the court between 2000 and 2004 because of her mother's mental condition and O'Neal's inability to deal with her own diabetes.

She was diagnosed with Type 1 juvenile diabetes when she was 14, but, according to the court records, she could not or would not follow doctors' orders on taking insulin and watching her intake of sugar.

Her father, Carl Jenkins, died in August 1999 and, according to the court records, O'Neal never came to terms with his death.

"She appears to experience an abnormal and excessive reaction to life stressors," a 2004 juvenile court report said.

One evaluator said O'Neal, then 18, had an adjustment disorder characterized by a depressed mood, low energy, little eye contact, frequent verbalizing of low self-esteem and unresolved guilt issues.

During four years of foster care, O'Neal frequently ran away from foster homes and failed to attend school, although Lillian Leak said O'Neal graduated from a special education program in 2004 at Denby High School in Detroit.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or [kresnak@freepress.com](mailto:kresnak@freepress.com).

# Adoptive parents get new chance

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

By John Agar  
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A judge today refused to terminate parental rights of a Kentwood couple who were accused of abusing their 12 adopted children.

But Jerome and Beryl Richards, once the state's Adoptive Parents of the Year, will have to change the way they raise the children if they hope to regain custody, Kent County Family Court Judge Nanaruth Carpenter decided.

The state tried to sever the parental rights after reports of physical abuse and neglect. Children said the couple beat them with belts and extension cords, and ignored claims of sexual assault.

"We're surprised," said Kristan Newhouse, the lawyer for 11 of the children.

"The judge made the call. That's her job," Assistant Kent County Prosecutor Vicki Seidl said.

"That's why people don't get railroaded into losing their children."

The Richardses gathered with supporters and prayed after the ruling. Bishop Walter Durham, their spokesman, called the decision "vindication. ... There's some hope in the system."

Carpenter said she did not find clear and convincing evidence that the children should be permanently removed, or that the parents realized that some of the children had been sexually abused in the home. A jury earlier gave her jurisdiction over placement of the children.

Carpenter said the parents will have three months to comply with caseworkers' plans if they want to get the children back. To terminate parental rights, she had to find that the allegations were "so egregious" that there was no hope for change in the parents, and that the children would risk injury.

But she added that testimony of some of the children was credible and "abhorrent to contemplate." She said the parents had to lose the mind-set that they did a favor to their adopted children, and become the "parents that these wonderful children deserve."

The children will remain in foster care. Some said they feared returning, but others wanted to go back.

# Judge Rules in Favor of Jerome and Buryl Richards

**WZZM 13 Grand Rapids**

**Created: 12/20/2005 9:02:36 AM**

**Updated: 12/20/2005 9:02:59 AM**

A Kent County Judge has ruled in favor of Jerome and Buryl Richards. In a decision handed down this morning, Judge Nanaruth Carpenter has decided that Jerome and Buryl Richards will keep custody of their 12 children.

While parental rights were not terminated, the Richards' will not regain custody of the children immediately.

The court also state that the Richards will have to have counseling sessions.

A Kent County jury had found enough evidence against adoptive parents Beryl and Jerome Richards to give a judge jurisdiction over 12 of their adopted children.

After weeks of testimony, members of the jury heard the evidence against Beryl and Jerome Richards, specifically charges that the couple knew about, but ignored sexual abuse between children in their home.

There were also allegations that they didn't properly feed the children. Prosecutors also accused the Richards of beating the children.

An attorney representing eleven of the children, Kris Newhouse, asked the jury, "Is it discipline? Belts, extension cords, hangers, spatulas, spoons, slippers, positions that last over days, food deprivation that lasts over days."

Defense attorney Kevin Cronin argued that the Richards did not know about any sexual abuse, that they fed their children well, and simply disciplined the kids. He told the jury, "Yes, they spanked the children and they used belts. I told you that on opening statement. They used reasonable force and the law does not prohibit a parent from using objects."

The Richards' attorney told the jury, the couple was just helping already troubled children. Cronin said, "We never expected a rose garden, but we never expected to find ourselves here, struggling to preserve our reputation, and unfairly accused with insufficient evidence to support it."

Three years ago Jerome and Buryl Richards were named Michigan's adoptive parents of the year.

Local News

## Tower man faces sex charges

By ERICA KOLASKI  
Tribune Staff Writer

TOWER - A 33-year-old Tower man has been arrested and charged in connection with three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct.

According to Cheboygan County Sheriff Dale Clarmont, Shannon James Miller was arrested on the criminal sexual conduct charges, one count of distributing obscene matter to children, one count of lewd and lascivious conduct as well as a second offense for habitual offender status.

Miller was arrested after an investigation and referral from the **Department of Human Services**.

Clarmont reported that the complaint says Miller had sexual contact with a minor in Forest Township from 2001 to 2005.

Miller was arraigned in 89th District Court and his bond set at \$250,000. He is scheduled for a preliminary exam on Dec. 28.

First-degree criminal sexual conduct is a felony punishable by up to life in prison. Distributing obscene matter is a misdemeanor punishable by up to two years and lewd and lascivious conduct is a misdemeanor punishable by up to one year.

December 20, 2005

## Man, 33, is facing multiple sex charges

FROM RECORD EAGLE STAFF REPORTS

CHEBOYGAN - A 33-year-old Tower man is charged with five felony and misdemeanor crimes after an investigation into his alleged sexual contact with a minor over the last four years.

Shannon James Miller was arraigned Monday in 89th District Court in Cheboygan and his bond was set at \$250,000. He will be back in court on Dec. 28 for a preliminary exam.

Miller faces three felony charges of criminal sexual conduct in the first degree, as well as misdemeanor charges of distributing obscene material to children and lewd and lascivious conduct.

Cheboygan County Sheriff Dale Clarmont said the investigation started after a referral from the Cheboygan **Department of Human Services**.

Miller is charged as a habitual offender, which can enhance sentencing. He faces a life in prison for the criminal sexual conduct counts, two years for the distribution misdemeanor and one year for the lewd conduct count.



# Toddler safe after SUV theft

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

LaNIA COLEMAN  
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Saginaw police launched an extensive search Monday that succeeded in finding a sport utility vehicle that was stolen with a 2-year-old in the back seat.

About 6:45 p.m., a thief drove off in a white 1997 GMC Suburban, which the owner left with the keys in the ignition at 2019 Glenwood, said Lt. Paul S. Crane.

The 41-year-old Bridgeport Township man who owns the GMC told police he turned off the engine but left his niece asleep in the vehicle when he went to the house to give the occupants an estimate on some work they wanted him to do, Crane said.

The thief took advantage of the opportunity and drove off, going south on Glenwood.

Brianna N. Covington was safe, awake and happy to see officers when they found her in the vehicle about 45 minutes later on Parkwood near Webber, a block from where the vehicle vanished.

The thief likely spotted the tot in the back seat and drove back to the neighborhood, ditching the vehicle where the owner could easily find it and leaving it running to keep the youngster warm, police said.

Footprints in the snow suggested that the culprit ran north on Parkwood, but a police tracking dog was unable to pick up a scent, officers said.

"We put everyone we had in the area," Crane said. "This was a legitimate Amber Alert scenario. The child was in a situation where she could be harmed. That's something where we will pull every available car into the area."

Crane said he was preparing to issue an Amber Alert when a sergeant found the youngster. v  
LaNia Coleman covers law enforcement for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9690.

# **Judge sentences former Albion police officer to 10 months in jail**

Trace Christenson  
*The Battle Creek Enquirer*

A former Albion police officer was sentenced to jail Monday for taking sexually explicit photos of a teenage girl.

Kyle Chaney, 39, the 2005 officer of the year for the Albion Department of Public Safety, was sentenced to 10 months in jail, placed on probation for five years and ordered to pay more than \$2,500 in fines and costs. He also must register with the state of Michigan as a sex offender.

In November, Chaney pleaded guilty to second-degree child abuse and using a computer to produce child sexually explicit material.

Chaney admitted he took nude pictures of the girl and stored them on his computer between June 2004 and August. He was fired from the department in September.

Before he was sentenced, Chaney told Calhoun County Circuit Judge Stephen Miller he had nothing to say.

But the mother of the girl said the incidents have devastated the girl, who is undergoing counseling. (The mother is not being identified by the Enquirer to protect the identity of the girl.)

"He had hidden behind his church and his badge," the woman told Miller. "This is a very sad and confusing time for our family. It will be years before the full impact has surfaced."

She said Chaney should spend the rest of his life in prison.

Chaney could have been sentenced to 20 years in prison on the original charges, which included producing and possession of child sexually abusive material, but prosecutors agreed to the plea agreements so the girl would not have to testify at a trial.

"The plea agreement was not for the benefit of Mr. Chaney," said Chris Johnson, a Kalamazoo County assistant prosecutor, appointed as a special prosecutor because Chaney was a former police officer in Calhoun County. "This was for the benefit of the child."

Chaney could have faced up to seven years in prison on the two charges but part of the plea agreement was that incarceration would be limited to the county jail. Johnson said Chaney has not yet taken responsibility for the crime, suggesting in an interview with a probation officer that it was the fault of the girl.

"I wonder if he will take responsibility down the road," she said.

Defense Attorney Mark Webb said Chaney has taken responsibility.

"He does realize the seriousness of what has transpired," he said. "He does take responsibility for his actions."

Miller told Chaney he is troubled by any adult who, instead of protecting children, abuses them.

"When you fail (with children) to protect and guard them, it is quite puzzling,"

Miller told Chaney. "It is a very sad situation."

*Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or [tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com](mailto:tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com).*

Originally published December 20, 2005

# Officer is sent to jail

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

By Pat Rombyer

[prombyer@citpat.com](mailto:prombyer@citpat.com) -- 768-4924

Kyle R. Chaney, the former Albion public safety officer who took nude photos of a teenager, was sent to jail Monday.

Chaney, 39, a decorated police officer and firefighter, was sentenced to 10 months in jail and five years probation on charges of second-degree child abuse and using a computer to commit a crime. He was given credit for the 41 days he spent in jail prior to being released on tether.

Calhoun County Circuit Judge Stephen Miller exceeded the probation department's recommended sentence of three years probation and six months in jail.

Chaney, a 14-year veteran of the Albion department, was initially charged Aug. 19 with four felonies related to child sexual abuse, including taking the nude pictures. He pleaded guilty to two felonies and avoided going to trial.

The victim, now 16 years old, was in the courtroom with family members but did not speak to the court.

She was 15 when Chaney began taking pictures of her, a practice that continued for more than a year, according to Calhoun County Sheriff's investigators. She said no sexual activity occurred.

Prior to issuing his sentence, the judge said it was evident that Chaney had not accepted responsibility for his actions. Instead, he said Chaney blamed the teenager for being immodest.

"I'm hopeful that counseling will help," Miller said.

Outside the courtroom, the victim's mother said Chaney has maintained his innocence.

"He claims he was set up," she said.

Prior to sentencing, she read a statement to the judge, urging him to sentence Chaney to at least a year in jail.

"It's been a sad and confusing time for our whole family," the mother said, adding that her daughter is in counseling.

She asked Miller to disallow any contact between Chaney and her daughter and the children in the community.

She also voiced concern that Chaney plans to marry a woman with two young daughters.

When questioned, Chaney admitted he had obtained a marriage license, but the marriage did not take place Dec. 9 as planned. He did not explain why.

In addition to jail and probation, Miller ordered Chaney to register as a sex offender; not own a device that connects to the Internet; have no contact with children under the age of 16; have no sexually stimulating materials and avoid places that do; undergo sex offender treatment and avoid any contact with the victim and her younger sister.

# Dad seeks to clear name in earlier abuse case, hopes to find girl's killer

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

By Theresa D. McClellan  
The Grand Rapids Press

LOWELL TOWNSHIP -- He claims his courtroom plea earlier this year to injuring his daughter was based on love.

John Gelineau, 19, said he wanted to be reunited with his young wife and keep their daughter out of foster care, so he pleaded no contest to second-degree child abuse -- and spent more than two months in jail for a crime he says he did not commit.

Eleven days after her birth, Elizabeth Gelineau suffered a skull fracture, broken ribs and a broken clavicle.

"I never said I did it; I just said I won't fight you on this," Gelineau said of pressure he claimed was brought by authorities and his wife's relatives. "I thought (by entering a plea) I would get my family back."

Now, more than a week after his 16-month-old daughter Elizabeth died of head injuries in what a medical examiner ruled a homicide, her father is seeking justice.

"My daughter was taken from me twice, and I hurt inside more than anybody knows," Gelineau said Monday at his family's home. "Now I feel like I've got a second chance to fight for my daughter and find out who is the murderer."

Authorities on Dec. 11 were called to 1501 Ridgewood Drive in Ottawa County's Jamestown Township, the home of the toddler's maternal great-grand-parents. Rescue personnel worked on the girl for a half hour before she died. The child lived there with her mother, Rachel Timmer, Timmer's boyfriend, and Timmer's grandparents. No one has been charged in the death.

Ottawa County authorities say Gelineau is not a suspect. The young father, who said he had not seen his daughter since August, declined to discuss who might have hurt her.

"I wasn't there" he said. Timmer, 18, and her grandparents could not be reached for comment.

Dressed in a crisp gray shirt, black pants and black silk tie, Gelineau frequently buried his face in his hands while talking about the daughter he called "the most beautiful little baby girl ever."

He and his wife met at Grandville High School, where she was a sophomore and he was a junior. When she became pregnant, they married and moved in with Timmer's grandparents.

John Gelineau said he was at football practice last year when he received word from his wife's grandfather that his newborn daughter had been injured.

"I was never home with practice and work and school," he said.

Upon learning his daughter was hurt, "I was angry."

John's father, Bill Gelineau, said he was willing to let the child be placed in foster care. "I thought that might be the best thing until they could figure out who did this to her."

But they said Timmer's relatives were adamant the baby not be in foster care. The state placed the child with Timmer's grandparents, and later reunited the baby and mother.

John Gelineau said authorities pressured him, telling him he would lose his child if he didn't plead to the offense.

Against the wishes of his parents and his attorney, the teen pleaded no contest. He now has a felony record.

"Have you ever been in love? That's the only way I can answer it. But she didn't love me as much as I loved her. That was obvious," John Gelineau said of his estranged wife.

He received divorce papers while in the Ottawa County Jail earlier this year.

The Gelineau family has asked that memorial donations for Elizabeth be made to the March of Dimes.

Editorial

# That does not compute

The Grand Rapids Press

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

Finding child pornography on a computer at a day-care home for children should be sufficient grounds to suspend an operating license. State licensing authorities need to explain why that wasn't the immediate outcome of a Grand Rapids case. The day-care owner now faces sexual assault and pornography charges. Lawmakers, parents and the public deserve answers to why the facility was allowed to operate at least six months after police found porn on a home computer before being shut down.

Not only was the license not immediately pulled by the Department of Human Services (DHS), but Kristopher Cross and his wife, Amanda, were granted a license renewal three months after police found photographs of nude teen-aged girls on their home computer.

It's a mind boggling decision that warrants an explanation. Lawmakers, especially Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, chairman of the Family and Human Services Committee, should demand one. He has scheduled a public hearing next month in Lansing to determine how to prevent another such incident.

Although the computer was seized in December 2004 during an investigation of a sexual abuse complaint by a 7-year-old girl, the nude images were recovered in February. Grand Rapids police initially were unable to get Kent County prosecutors to charge Mr. Cross in the abuse probe or on the porn charge. Two other alleged victims have now come forward and Mr. Cross has been charged with sexually assaulting three young girls at the day-care home between 2001 and 2004. He's also facing a child pornography charge.

Lawmakers want to find out why the state allowed the day care to remain open after pornography was discovered on a computer in the home. Sen. Bill Hardiman is not alone in wanting to know what it takes to pull a day-care license if pornography doesn't qualify. He also has concerns about parental notification of day-care investigations or the lack thereof.

Jim Gale, director of the state's Office of Children and Adult Licensing within the DHS, said every complaint made against a day-care facility is not automatically shared with every parent. He said the state's Child Protective Act, which covers protective services cases and privacy issues, sometimes limits what can be shared. Mr. Gale also cited the due process rights of day-care operators. He said notifying every parent about allegations that have not been investigated or later prove to be unfounded could harm day-care owners.

Due process is a hallmark of our judicial system. But parents with children in a day-care facility where an individual is under investigation for alleged sexual abuse would be understandably upset by being kept in the dark, especially if the charges turn out to be true. Temporarily closing the day care -- without revealing the reason -- until a thorough probe is conducted, might be a solution. Balancing the rights of day-care owners with the need to protect children being cared for in such facilities should not be an impossible task.

Published December 20, 2005

## **Boy, 16, accused of arson, murder Lansing teen charged as adult in Mares' death**

By Kevin Grasha  
Lansing State Journal

A 16-year-old Lansing boy is being charged as an adult in the death of 69-year-old Sara Mares, police said.

Marcus Anthony Matthews was arraigned Monday in Lansing District Court on multiple charges - felony murder, arson and car theft.

Firefighters found Mares' body in her bedroom Wednesday after they responded to a call that there was a fire at her home on Lansing's north side.

Police still would not reveal the cause of death.

"It's one of those things that's not obvious," said Lansing police Lt. Bruce Ferguson.

He would not provide any information about Matthews.

On Saturday, divers from Lansing Police Department searched the Grand River for a weapon, but did not find anything.

Mares was killed in an apparent robbery, Ferguson said.

Police said Matthews stole Mares' Mercury Sable, and they found him after searching for the car.

He is being held without bond at the Ingham County Youth Center.

Mares' husband of about six years, 51-year-old Jose Mares, is serving a life sentence in a Jackson prison for second-degree murder.

The couple met while Jose was in prison.

Ferguson said they don't consider anyone other than Matthews a suspect.

For the past year, Sara Mares had been working for the Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending, a nonprofit public policy organization that advocates shifting government spending from incarceration to prevention.



"She had a capacity for making other people feel comfortable and was empathetic toward others," said Barbara Levine, the organization's executive director.

She said Mares did office work and some research a few days a week, in addition to volunteer work.

"She did what she believed in," Levine said, "and worked for what she believed in."

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or [kgrasha@lsj.com](mailto:kgrasha@lsj.com).

What's next

- A preliminary hearing for Marcus Anthony Matthews, 16, who is being charged as an adult in the death of 69-year-old Sara Mares, is scheduled for Dec. 29 in Lansing District Court. He is being held without bond at the Ingham County Youth Center.

Detroit News

December 20, 2005

## **Boy faces more molestation charges**

Additional charges against a 13-year-old Brighton boy accused of molesting a 7-year-old girl are expected to be authorized today in the county's Juvenile Court. A hearing was to be held at 10 a.m. The boy, whose name is not being released by The Detroit News because of his age, faces sexual assault charges after allegedly luring the girl into one of the bathrooms at the Brighton District Library on Dec. 13.

# Budget Accord Could Mean Payments by Medicaid Recipients

By ROBERT PEAR  
The New York Times

Published: December 20, 2005

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19 - The final Congressional agreement on a budget bill gives states sweeping new authority to impose premiums and co-payments on Medicaid recipients, freezes doctors' pay under Medicare and toughens work requirements for welfare recipients.

In negotiations over Medicaid, the health program for more than 50 million low-income people, House Republicans generally prevailed over the Senate.

The agreement between the two chambers, approved on Monday by the House, incorporates many recommendations from governors of both parties, who had sought new power to rein in the soaring cost of Medicaid.

Under the agreement, states can charge premiums and higher co-payments for a wide range of Medicaid benefits, including prescription drugs, doctors' services and hospital care.

States can scale back benefits, capping or eliminating coverage for services that federal law now guarantees.

In addition, states can end Medicaid coverage for people who fail to pay premiums for 60 days or more. Pharmacists can refuse to fill prescriptions, and doctors and hospitals can deny services, for recipients who do not make the required co-payments.

The agreement also makes it more difficult for older Americans to qualify for Medicaid coverage of nursing home care after transferring assets to their children or other relatives for less than fair market value.

In general, Medicaid would not cover long-term care for any person with home equity of more than \$500,000, although a state could choose to set the ceiling at a higher level, up to \$750,000.

The Congressional Budget Office said the budget bill would save the federal government \$26.5 billion in Medicaid and \$22.3 billion in Medicare over the next 10 years.

Drug makers and health insurance companies escaped largely unscathed. Negotiators rejected several provisions of the Senate bill that would have cut their payments.

Under the final agreement, all states have to ensure that half their welfare recipients are engaged in work or related activities like searching for employment.

Under the current law, a reduction in a state's caseload leads to a reduction in its work requirements, and administration officials said the number of welfare recipients had fallen so far in some states that the federal law imposed no meaningful work requirements.

Republicans hailed the final budget bill as evidence of their determination to rein in the automatic growth of benefit programs.

Representative Joe L. Barton, Republican of Texas, the architect of the Medicaid provisions, said the higher co-payments were needed to "encourage personal responsibility" among low-income people.

Medicaid recipients can be charged 10 percent of the cost of any item or service if their family incomes were 100 percent to 150 percent of the federal poverty level, \$12,830 to \$19,245 for a family of two. Recipients with incomes above that can be required to pay 20 percent of the cost of any item or service. Total co-payments for all people in a family cannot exceed 5 percent of family income.

Senator Jeff Bingaman, Democrat of New Mexico, said, "It's very disappointing that Congressional leaders would decide to cut health care benefits and coverage to children, while imposing a greater cost-sharing burden on the poor, disabled and elderly."

AARP, the lobby for older Americans, denounced the final agreement.

"It protects the pharmaceutical industry, the managed care industry and other providers at the expense of low-income Medicaid beneficiaries and Medicare beneficiaries who will foot the bill," said William D. Novelli, chief executive of AARP.

Lawrence E. Davidow of Suffolk County, N.Y., president of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, whose members advise older people and their families, said, "I'm horrified and surprised that Congress would turn its back on middle-class senior citizens who look to Medicaid as a safety net to pay for long-term care."

Under the agreement, Mr. Davidow said, "it's more likely that people who need long-term care will lose their homes and everything they have worked a lifetime to acquire, because they'll have to use their assets to pay for nursing home care."

The Bush administration announced last month that it would cut fees paid to doctors treating Medicare patients by 4.4 percent in 2006. It said the cut was required by a statutory formula. Congress decided instead to freeze doctors' fees next year. That would increase Medicare spending over the next five years by \$7.3 billion above the amounts expected under the current law, the budget office said. Beneficiaries would pay some of the cost through higher premiums. Under the agreement, states will not have to provide Medicaid recipients with all the services now required by federal law, but can offer a more modest package of benefits resembling commercial insurance.

The agreement also gives states new authority to charge co-payments as a way to discourage the use of high-cost drugs and the use of hospital emergency rooms for nonemergency care.

House Republican aides said they meant to preserve one of the most important Medicaid benefits, known as "early and periodic screening, diagnostic and treatment services," for children younger than 19. The bill appears to be ambiguous on whether that is an option or a requirement for states, but Senate Republicans said it was intended to be a requirement.

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

## **Medicare changes raise confusion**

### **Pharmacies, nursing homes wonder who will pay the bills, which drugs the new plans will cover.**

Robert Pear / New York Times

**WASHINGTON--** Two weeks before the start of the Medicare prescription drug benefit, pharmacists and nursing homes are desperately trying to find out who will pay for the medicines taken by hundreds of thousands of their residents.

The new law relies on private insurers to deliver drug benefits to older Americans. About two-thirds of the 1.5 million residents of nursing homes are participants in Medicare and Medicaid. The government has randomly assigned them to private drug plans, regardless of needs.

In many cases, nursing homes said, they do not know to which plans their patients have been assigned. As a result, they do not know who will pay the bills or what drugs will be covered.

Each plan has its own list of approved drugs.

Becky A. Kurtz, the state-appointed ombudswoman for nursing home residents in Georgia, said: "We see a lot of confusion and a very steep learning curve for nursing home residents and employees. Many residents are not covered for all their medications under the plan to which they have been assigned."

By contrast, Kurtz said, "under the state Medicaid program, these residents have had nearly all their drugs covered."

Nursing home residents take an average of eight to nine medications a day. The Bush administration said it sent letters to people entitled to Medicare and Medicaid, announcing Medicaid coverage of their prescription drugs would end Jan. 1.

Paul Baldwin, director of the Long Term Care Pharmacy Alliance, which represents providers of prescription drug services, said, "Nursing home operators and pharmacies are desperately trying to figure out where these dual-eligible individuals have been assigned."

To obtain the information, nursing homes can submit online queries to a federal Web site or they can send a list of beneficiaries by facsimile to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

A spokesman for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said the information would be available before Dec. 31.

Drug plans are supposed to have procedures to ensure a smooth transition, perhaps by covering a patient's drugs for a few months.

# Doctor dedicated to those in need

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

By Susan Harrison Wolffis

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Dr. Maureen Street has been to the other side of poverty and back.

Though she's now the medical director of Muskegon Family Care in Muskegon Heights -- a health clinic for low-income patients and those without health insurance -- Street was once on public assistance herself.

There were times she couldn't get health care for her three children or herself. The family lived meager paycheck to meager paycheck, whatever she could earn waiting tables while going to college at Wayne State University.

"Just because you are where you are doesn't mean you'll be here forever," she likes to tell her patients.

Her own life is proof of that.

And it has made Street, 50, an impassioned advocate for the medically underserved.

"That is my role as a physician," she says.

But the story how she became a physician, the journey she took to get off assistance and earn her medical degree, is one of inspiration and grit.

"I was raised in the tradition that you always get up," she says.

When she was 17, she ran away from home and family in Detroit. She was a high school dropout committed to working in the anti-Vietnam War movement, no matter what the cost or sacrifice.

"I was brought up in the Catholic-Irish culture of service and fairness," she says. "It's what I had to do."

She found work in one of Detroit's auto plants. By the time she was 19, she was a union steward, the youngest on record. She married a fellow activist when she was 19 and "waited a year to get pregnant to show everybody I didn't have to get married."

She and her husband named their first-born Kevin. Soon there was a second son, Sean, born just 15 months later. "Irish twins, we call them," she says.

Tragedy struck when the boys were little. Their father, who was working on the Rev. Jesse Jackson's 1980 presidential campaign, was killed in a car accident while on the job.

Maureen Street was a widow at 25.

She decided she'd better go to school if she was going to support two small sons. It took her 11 years, but this former high school dropout earned her undergraduate degree at Wayne State University.

She took morning classes while her boys attended a cooperative day-care program on campus and later school. In the afternoons, she studied and took care of her family. At night after the children went to bed, she worked in bars and restaurants to earn a living while her mother babysat.

It was a hardscrabble life. Street and her children had to rely on public assistance to help pay the bills. They were on Medicaid and often couldn't find a doctor who would treat them.

"I've had the experience of not being able to access health care," she says. "I've been humiliated several times ... when I had to go to clinics where I had to sit for hours and wait to be called. It's a horrible feeling."

But she never gave up her goal of going to school and finishing her degree. Early on, she discovered what she wanted to be: a physician, the perfect blend of her love of science and service.

Along the way, Street fell in love and married a musician. It was an interracial marriage which caused friction in her family and the neighborhood in which she lived.

"It was very dangerous to be an interracial couple in those days," she says. "The Ku Klux Klan showed up at my door one night."

The marriage ended in divorce after just two years, but not before the couple had a daughter, Kathleen.

When she was 34, the woman who had dropped out of high school and run away from home when she was a teen-ager applied to Wayne State University's medical school. They told her she was too old, that she'd taken too long to finish her undergraduate degree.

So she applied to Michigan State University College of Human Medicine where she was welcomed as an older student.

"Once I started med school, my life became very easy. Things fell into place," she says. "I had to look at the spiritual side of life. ... I was fortunate to land where I landed. Clearly, this was being directed for me."

Her children were in good schools. They lived on campus in good housing while she earned her M.D. and completed her residency as MSU's St. Lawrence Hospital. While a resident, she was awarded the Mercy Scholar award by Mercy Health System -- an award given to physicians dedicated to community service and primary care to the underserved.

She started by creating a free medical clinic in the Women's Domestic Violence Shelter in Lansing. After her residency, she moved to Grand Rapids and worked at St. Mary's Hospital to build a health center in the inner city: Browning Claytor Health Center.

It began in a double-wide trailer and grew into a huge center that provided health care in a neighborhood that had not had a family doctor for more than 20 years.

"For so many years, (low-income patients) received substandard health care. They were demeaned ... treated badly. All people deserve to be treated well," she says.

She stayed in Grand Rapids for five years, then was recruited three years ago to be the medical director of Muskegon Family Care as it made the transition from an outdated building to the new \$3.7 million facility at 2201 S. Getty.

But just as she was getting ready to make the move, her life was gripped by tragedy once again. In May 2003, a month before she was to start in Muskegon, Street was notified that her son -- Army Sgt. Sean Christopher Reynolds, 26, a Ranger in the Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade -- was killed in northern Iraq.

The anti-war protestor had lost a son to war.

"I had this unwritten prayer: God take care of my children," she says. "I'll do all of this work ... take care of all of these people ... please, don't take one of my kids."

When Sean was 17, newly graduated from East Lansing High School, he went to his mother and asked her to sign his papers so he could enlist in the Army. He was the same age as she when she set out on life.

"I said: 'I can't do that,' " she remembers. "I'm an anti-war activist. His dad and I have arrest records ... But, he said, 'Mom, you taught us to think for ourselves.' He really believed in the vows of the Rangers. It was his form of social justice."

She prayed her unwritten prayer every day for all of her children, but especially for Sean because he was in some of the world's most dangerous places. He could never tell his mother where he was until after he'd been there. He'd been to Afghanistan for a tour of duty before being sent to Iraq. He was in Kirkuk when he died.

"To know the devastation when one soldier dies ... some families are destroyed," Street says. She began work in Muskegon while in the first weeks of mourning, and when she looks back on, she wonders how she did it.

"I didn't think I could get up and out of bed," she remembers, "but I needed to set an example for my children."

This, too, she takes with her when she treats her patients, many of whom face unspeakable sorrows of their own.

"People ask how I did it," she says. "I tell them: Keep breathing. Take a breath in, and breathe out. That's all I did for a year."

Since coming to Muskegon, Street has tried to make a difference in big ways and small. In the fall, she and her staff at Muskegon Family Care sponsored their third annual "mammogram party" that drew hundreds of women, some of whom had never had mammograms before.

She also makes a difference one-on-one. As she takes her turn delivering babies or examining patients in rotation with the other five providers, Street talks to them about making plans for life. When a patient finishes his or her GED, Street -- a former high school dropout herself -- often springs for lunch.

She throws in a pep talk, too.

"A lot of what I do is spread the word that every human being on Earth has potential," she says.

"It's something I really believe in."



# Macomb Co. seeks money for homeless

December 20, 2005

BY SHABINA S. KHATRI  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

When 20-year-old Ashlee Campbell called the Salvation Army MATTS shelter two weeks ago, the group didn't have any beds left for her or her 2-year-old son. But when she called the Warren center the next day, a spot had opened up.

Campbell was lucky. More than 800 others in Macomb County have not been.

The search for shelter has become a matter of life and death for a growing number of people in Macomb County, officials and charitable groups said Monday, when the county announced a campaign to raise money for homeless people during a news conference in Mt. Clemens.

There are more than 1,100 homeless people -- including more than 200 children -- in Macomb County, a 5% increase from last year, according to the Michigan Department of Human Services. And 11 homeless people have died this year -- at least one by freezing to death and several from weather-related health problems, said Carrie Fortune, coordinator for the Macomb Homeless Coalition.

According to information supplied to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development by local groups, the city of Detroit has 14,827 homeless people; the rest of Wayne County has 735. Oakland County has 1,293 homeless people.

Fortune and other leaders are asking for donations to help the hundreds of homeless people shelters in Macomb County cannot accommodate. In the short term, the groups hope to raise at least \$35,500 -- about the cost of feeding those 800 people for the next 90 days.

Because the county has only about 350 beds for emergency shelter, money raised also will temporarily house homeless families in area hotel rooms.

"We're not asking because it's the holiday season," said Nancy White, chairwoman of the Macomb County Board of Commissioners. "For the homeless, this is not the holiday season -- this is the cold season."

Campbell, who said she left her Clinton Township home because of personal reasons, encourages people to donate to shelters like MATTS (Macomb's Answer to Temporary Shelter). "Anything helps," said Campbell, who plans to earn her GED. "They're doing the best they can with the little money that they have."

*To donate, send a check payable to either the Macomb Homeless Coalition or Macomb Food Program to Macomb Together, Mt. Clemens 48043. Contact **SHABINA S. KHATRI***

# Homeless lack shelter

## Fund set up for Katrina victims now will raise money for local needy

PUBLISHED: December 20, 2005

By Chad Selweski  
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Declaring a "homeless crisis" in Macomb County, officials announced Monday that a fund created in September to aid Gulf Coast hurricane victims will now raise money to assist the 800 homeless people in the county without shelter.

With temperatures hovering below freezing on a daily basis, Macomb's 350 shelter beds fall far short of serving the 1,141 people who are homeless on a daily basis. So far this year, 11 deaths in the county have been attributed to homeless people who could not handle the elements.

"This isn't about making ourselves feel better for doing something nice during the holidays," said county board Chairwoman Nancy White. "For our homeless, this isn't the holiday season -- it's the cold season. And their crisis will linger after the holidays and continue until we help them gain a sure footing in their lives."

The Macomb Together fund, which raised nearly \$250,000 for Hurricane Katrina victims, will now be known as Macomb Together -- Helping At Home. Officials are seeking donations from local businesses and residents to help the homeless survive the winter.

Estimates indicate the cost of sheltering the 800 unserved homeless for the next 90 days is \$3,500 per person or family. The cost to feed those people for 90 days is \$35,000.

While the homeless population rose 5 percent since 2004, the number of homeless children enrolled in Macomb County schools has jumped from 237 last year to 331 at last count.

"We're looking at possibly doubling the number of homeless children," said Carrie Fortune, county coordinator for homeless services. "What the school liaisons are telling me is they're seeing more children due to a job loss by a parent."

While homelessness was often associated in the past with substance abuse problems or mental health issues, advocates say many homeless are now living on the streets because of Michigan's struggling economy. According to the state Department of Human Services, more than half of Macomb's homeless adults hold at least a part-time job. But 90 percent have factors that complicate their personal finances -- they have small

children, they were victims of domestic violence, or they care for a disabled child or spouse.

Mary Solomon, deputy director of the Macomb County Community Services Agency, said the official homeless count doesn't reflect the thousands of poor who find themselves without a home for short periods of time. Solomon's department, which oversees the Macomb Food Program, delivered 35,000 pounds of food on a single day last week to 52 local food pantries.

Most of the 350 shelter beds in Macomb County are supplied by The Salvation Army and churches that provide shelter or "warming centers" on a rotating basis.

Advocates tell stories about the homeless they have encountered that defy Macomb's status as a middle class suburban county:

A woman and her two daughters suffered a house fire and, with her husband serving overseas in the Iraq war, she was financially devastated and left without a place to live. When the American Red Cross could provide just \$145 worth of aid due to the heavy emphasis on Katrina relief efforts, the family was forced to move in with relatives.

A woman eight-months pregnant held a part-time job that allowed her to live in a hotel two or three days each week and then in her car for the remaining days until her next paycheck arrived.

A 54-year-old woman lived in a tent in the woods for several months. She appeared articulate and employable but had suffered financial setbacks.

A woman arrived in the lobby of the Macomb County Jail with a hammer in hand, hoping to get arrested for assaulting an officer so she would have a place behind bars to stay for the night. When she was escorted out, she returned with a screw driver and lunged at a high-ranking sheriff's department officer in hopes of being incarcerated.

Ruthie Stevenson, an activist at the Greater Morningstar Baptist Church in Mount Clemens, which serves the homeless and the poor at its Tyson House, said more churches in Macomb County must commit to helping those in need.

"I would say, you need to step up to the plate," Stevenson said. "We have a mandate to step forward and give back."

## Donations needed for homeless families

By CARLA BUMSTEAD  
Staff Writer

EATON RAPIDS — The need is immediate, and hope is dwindling for many former homeless Families and individuals being served by Housing Services for Eaton County.

Denise Dunn, who serves as executive director for HSEC, said the agency's program, known as the "Homeless Follow-Up Program," has seen a critical drop in businesses and individuals wishing to adopt a family this holiday season.

"We've seen a decrease in donations across the board, both in money and in-kind, since September, when Katrina hit," Dunn said. "More importantly, we have not had people calling to say they are interested in adopting a family — something that people have typically done every year.

"In the past, we've always had businesses or organizations call to say they'd like to adopt a family, but we've had no one do that this year," Dunn said. "This is the first year we've ever had to go looking to try and find contributions."

She said the program is for families who were recently homeless and often are single mothers with children, although HSEC has seen a rise in the number of single individuals in need, Dunn said.

The families typically create a "wish list" of items. Dunn said those items most often include basics such as clothes, socks, shoes and pajamas. For those with younger children, there may be toys on the list.

Those wishing to adopt a family usually get the list from HSEC and buy and wrap the items. Or the HSEC case workers use cash donations and do the buying themselves. Families pick up the items from the HSEC office one or two days before Christmas so they can be put under the family's tree.

Dunn said the case worker in charge of the program is DeAnn Moreno, and she currently has around 80 people on her caseload — representing about 25 families.

The reason for the drop in those willing to adopt a family this holiday season has several causes, according to Dunn.

"It is probably related to people having already given to Katrina relief, and the economy is not doing as well," Dunn said. "There are also worries about the automotive industry, heating costs are up and gas prices are decimating everyone's discretionary funds."

Dunn admits it is getting very late to try and collect enough funds for those on the list this year.

"At this point, I'd tell people to either call us or stop in immediately," Dunn said.

She said, because it is so close to Christmas, monetary donations would be best. HSEC is located at 319 S. Cochran in Charlotte. The phone number is (517) 541-1180.

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# Cities say need for aid for homeless is rising

12/20

ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Americans needed more emergency food and shelter last year than the year before, according to a 24-city survey released Monday by the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

Requests for food assistance grew by 12 percent, with 76 percent of the cities surveyed reporting an increase. Appeals for shelter assistance increased by 6 percent, with 71 percent of cities showing an increase, according to the annual Hunger and Homelessness Survey.

"The statistics continue

to get worse and worse in spite of our Herculean efforts," San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom said.

Among the findings:

► On average, 18 percent of requests for emergency food and 14 percent of requests for emergency shelter were estimated to have gone unmet.

► Eighty-seven percent of cities said the average length of time that people were homeless — seven months — increased.

► Fifty-four percent of those who asked for emergency food were families, children and their parents.

Published December 20, 2005  
[ From the Lansing State Journal ]

## **Schneider: Life in a tent in December is substandard, indeed**

Two men who checked into Lansing's Loaves and Fishes shelter for the homeless a few days ago told the people who run the shelter a story about being rousted from their home.

They called it unfair. After all, they had permission from the property owner, they said, to pitch their tent - yes, their TENT - in the vicinity of Oakland and Pennsylvania avenues.

The tent, it seems, got "red tagged" - labeled by city officials as substandard and uninhabitable.

And who could blame the officials? Who could argue with that assessment?

Who could imagine spending even one of these December nights protected from the cold by nothing but a thin layer of nylon, and not be chilled to the bone?

Steve Maloney, a code compliance officer for the City of Lansing, said Monday he wasn't familiar with this particular case.

But he acknowledged that a tent being red-tagged is within the realm of possibility.

Pitching a tent in your backyard for your kids to camp out in occasionally is one thing, Maloney said. Using one as an actual residence is another thing entirely.

All dwellings within the city limits must comply with all the codes applicable to safety and sanitation. Unless it's in a licensed campground, a tent would fail the test on a number of different fronts.

If city officials were unable to personally contact the men living in the tent, it's possible they could have red-tagged it as substandard.

Hot meal, warm bed

In a letter to me about the incident, the Loaves and Fishes volunteer who took the two men in, Wally Schneider, wrote, in part:

"They had sleeping bags, food and a few other possessions to exist in the cold weather. ... One of the men, who is 63, has emphysema. The other man, who is younger, said he wanted to bunk near the older man so he could take care of him at night."

At Loaves and Fishes, the two men received clean clothes, hearty meals, hot showers and warm beds.

The shelter, at 831 N. Sycamore St., has room for four women and six men. The normal stay is two weeks, during which time the staff helps clients find permanent housing.

Schneider, a retired state employee who has been a Loaves and Fishes volunteer for 25 years, knows as well as anybody that people end up on the streets for a lot of different reasons.

He has met homeless people who are illiterate and those with doctorate degrees. Some have served time in prison, and some have substance-abuse problems. They are victims of mental illness, despair, financial disaster, poor choices, bad luck.

The thing they all have in common, Schneider said, is that they deserve both compassion and practical assistance.

He added: "We try to restore their dignity and get them on the right track. We can pray for them in church, but we also have to get out there and lend a hand."

*MIRS*

*December 19, 2005*

## **Cox Hits \$20 Million In Deadbeat Collection**

Look for Attorney General Mike COX to announce on Tuesday that his office has collected \$20 million from "deadbeat parents" that will go toward supporting some 2,100 children in Michigan.

The beefed-up effort at collecting back child support payments was one of the first major programs unveiled by the AG during his first year in office. When he was elected, he pledged to hit the \$25 million plateau before his first term was completed. A source in the office suggested the \$25 million objective will be met by the end of next year.

The special team appointed by Cox to go after "deadbeat parents" netted some \$10 million this year.

*(Contributed by Senior Capital Correspondent Tim **SKUBICK**.)*



Tuesday, December 20, 2005

## **Having a job threatens federal benefits Those with disabilities gain independence, but lose what could be a vital financial safety net.**

Marisa Schultz / The Detroit News

Getting a job may mean independence, but for many people with disabilities, employment also means losing their safety net: government benefits.

People with disabilities are typically eligible for either Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The former is for older people who have worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes. The latter is designed for people with disabilities with little or no income; it's funded by general taxes.

For many people on SSI and SSDI, these federal benefits along with Medicaid or Medicare are often their only lifeline to food, health care and shelter. However, when a person finds work, disability benefits eventually decline.

"The disincentive to work ... is a crime," said Joe Pellerito Jr., academic program director for the occupational therapy program at Wayne State University. "If someone works, at some point they will ultimately lose their benefits. Some people with disabilities can't jump into a 40-hour-a-week job. They would be more successful at 10 hours a week, but then SSI is cut."

Studies by Cornell University suggest that this disincentive to work may be a factor in the drop in employment for people with disabilities. At one time, experts thought the passage of the ADA in 1990 may have contributed to the decline, with employers scared off by the flurry of rules.

However, studies at Cornell's Employment and Disability Institute show the decline in employment began after 1984, when federal legislation "substantially expanded" the medical definition of disability used for both these disability programs.

Today, almost 9 million working-age adults with disabilities receive support from the programs, which cost \$87.3 billion to run annually, according to a 2005 Cornell University study.

"People invest a lot of time and energy to get on the Social Security rolls," said Harold Wasner, manager of policy and planning at Michigan Rehabilitation Services. "They are not going to quickly get off of them, because they represent a safety net for them."

About 24 percent of working-age people with disabilities in Michigan and nationally already are considered as living in poverty, according to studies at Cornell. Poverty for a single person under age 65 was an income less than \$9,827 in 2004 and \$19,157 for a family of four.

"People with disabilities who have low skills or who can't work long hours, they are basically trapped," said David Stapleton, director of Cornell University Institute for Policy Research.

"They can rely on SSI or SSDI and live at low income levels or they can go to work and still live at low-income levels."

Detroit News

December 20, 2005

## **Grant sought for childhood program**

The Livingston Educational Service Agency recently approved a grant application to the Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corp. to help plan for a comprehensive early childhood system. The grant application asks for \$150,000 from Feb. 1 until Jan. 31, 2007. The agency also recently approved the submission of a grant application to the Michigan Department of Education for \$44,284 for "Great Parents, Great Start" which is a program that is aimed at helping families with newborns through 5-year-olds.

# Gain trust to help 'at risk' kids

*Dr. Yvonne Fournier / Scripps Howard News Service*

*December 20, 2005*

*Detroit News*

**Dear Dr. Fournier:** I am an inner-city social worker and am also studying for a master's degree in guidance counseling. Could you send me information on strategies to motivate non-achievers using positive and enjoyable study skills? Also, how can I help the parents of these high-risk students assist their children/adolescents at home?

**Dear Reader:** As you make the transition from "at-risk" to collaborator, you need to raise your level of awareness:

Recognize how your perspective differs from your students'. Even if you are of the same ethnic background, you already are a part of the "pot" if you have a job, receive a paycheck and spend your free time thinking of your next purchase. No matter how pure your motivation, look at the situation from your students' perspective and realize your efforts might stir up mistrust and hurt.

Recognize that, as part of the "pot," your goal is to stay there -- to hold on to your secure position. But for the students you deal with, security has eluded them and survival is their area of expertise.

Recognize that a person holding on to security does not break the rules of acceptance. A person holding on to survival must, on a daily basis, make rules to deal with a world that rejects him.

Recognize that a rule-follower has little to teach a rule-maker. Because these "at-risk" children must constantly develop new strategies, our nation should look to them as "Our Hope." In their constant thinking mode, we can find strength that becomes the value-added strength our nation needs.

Once you can recognize these four factors, you are ready to start the transition to becoming a guidance counselor -- not to guide students into copying the rules that make you secure, but to help them recognize personal strengths and strategies and how to apply these to learning.

Have your students list five things they know intuitively (without testing) that make them fail in school. For example, "I can't read a lot of big words," or "I really listen, but I can't understand what the teacher is saying." Then have them pick one and begin to develop a strategy to overcome and survive. For example, "I'll underline words I don't understand and ask my guidance counselor to read them to me," or, "I'll tell my teacher that I'll write one idea I think I heard and ask him to correct it."

With guidance, redirect the capacity to develop strategies toward ways for the students to reach the "pot." Do not attempt to establish exactly what success is; you might pick something that makes you look good (such as an increase in the students' test scores) instead of what will make the students achieve their needs.

In dealing with parents, let them know that you hope to guide their children from trust rather than from fear. Help the parents ensure their own recognition of the strengths they have -- their strength to survive until a nation decided they were needed.

Michigan Report

December 19, 2005

## **GRANHOLM BLASTS U.S. HOUSE BUDGET CUT**

A \$39.7 billion cut in human services spending approved at nearly 6 a.m. by the U.S. House of Representatives could make it more difficult for the poor in Michigan to become self-sufficient and stay healthy, Governor Jennifer Granholm said Monday through a spokesperson, and the U.S. Senate should “say no to this legislative lump of coal.”

Officials are still calculating what the overall effect could be on federal spending to Michigan’s budget if the proposal becomes law. The nearly \$40 billion in cuts is smaller than the figure the U.S. House considered several weeks ago, when Ms. Granholm worried that the impact on Michigan could \$1 billion over five years.

The impact is still likely to be hundreds of millions of dollars, and Ms. Granholm’s spokesperson Liz Boyd said it will have a drastic effect on the state’s efforts to help individuals achieve self-reliance and stay healthy.

Funding will be cut for Medicaid, cash assistance to the poor, job training and other programs. The largest share of spending cuts will be to Medicaid, which means more federal money will go to other states, Ms. Boyd said.

The U.S. Senate is expected to vote on the spending plan on Tuesday.

New York Times Editorial

December 20, 2005

## **Last-Minute Budget Madness**

As 11th-hour ploys go in Congress, the Republican leadership lowered the bar into the permafrost by ignoring rules and slapping Alaskan oil drilling onto a must-pass bill to pay for the Iraq war. The House, which earlier voted against drilling in the Alaska wildlife refuge, retreated and went along with the gimmickry orchestrated by Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, the diehard champion of opening his state's pristine resources to the oil industry.

This "victory" for the Bush administration, which may yet be filibustered in the Senate, was the prelude to an even more cynical move - \$40 billion in spending cuts that unfairly burden the poorest Americans with reductions in health care, child support and welfare.

"The Republican revolution is back," proclaimed Representative Mike Pence of Indiana, a leader of the conservative Republican "budget hawks" now trying to palm off political rope-a-dope as revolution. Their ballyhooed savings, less than one-half of 1 percent of Congress's \$14.3 trillion projected spending plan across the next five years, would be more than canceled by the next wad of tax cuts for the affluent - up to \$100 billion - that G.O.P. leaders are vowing to enact next year. These same lawmakers have repeatedly fed the record deficit and debt by rubber-stamping tax cuts.

In the final deal-making, the Republican Congress spared the pharmaceutical and managed care industries from cutbacks but increased the workfare burdens on low-paid former welfare recipients. They granted flu vaccine makers windfall protection from lawsuits, but enacted a startling \$12.7 billion cut in student aid. Including hurricane reconstruction aid and anti-torture strictures hardly disinfects the budget morass being left behind.

# **Ex-housing agent charged with theft**

## **Woman who worked in Ypsilanti office took more than \$1 million, documents allege**

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

BY AMALIE NASH

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

A former state housing official who worked in Washtenaw County was charged Monday by federal officials with stealing more than \$1 million that should have benefited low-income residents.

LaToya Cotton, 45, faces a charge of theft from a federally funded program, and prosecutors are seeking to seize her upscale Canton Township home.

Cotton, who had been under investigation for several months, is accused of bilking the Michigan State Housing Development Authority out of \$1,052,701 from 1994 to 2005, according to the charging documents filed Monday.

Timothy McDaniel, Cotton's Ann Arbor attorney, said he had not seen the charging documents and could not comment until he reviewed them.

Cotton served as a housing choice voucher agent in Washtenaw County, and was responsible for signing up and administering candidates for programs like Section 8 housing. Cotton instead created a bogus company named Washtenaw Payee Services and directed the voucher funds into that bank account, said Gina Balaya of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Detroit.

Balaya said prosecutors and Cotton have worked on a plea agreement in the case, but she has not yet pleaded guilty. The terms of the agreement call for 37 to 46 months in prison, along with restitution for the funds stolen, Balaya said.

Cotton is expected to schedule a date to go before District Judge Patrick Duggan to plead to the charges, Balaya said.

Cotton's downtown Ypsilanti office was raided by federal agents Sept. 13. Officials from the state housing development authority said her ties to the agency were severed that day. She had been a housing agent for at least 11 years.

Federal documents unsealed in October indicated that Cotton came under investigation last March after the housing development authority learned that a client living in a residence owned by the Ann Arbor Housing Commission had been unable to secure housing subsidy payments. The reason the client was deemed ineligible was that records showed the client was already receiving Section 8 vouchers sent to a company called Washtenaw Payee Services, the documents said.

Officials said Cotton was using information from people who would actually be eligible for housing vouchers, but those people were not aware and did not receive any benefits.

Greg Stejskal, FBI senior agent in Ann Arbor, said agents continue to investigate the dollar amount of the loss and whether anyone else was involved in the scheme.

"Because of this fraud, people in need were not getting Section 8 vouchers," Stejskal said.

"Hopefully, a few more people will be able to participate in the program now."

The charging documents filed Monday also indicate that authorities intend to seize Cotton's home as property obtained through the proceeds she embezzled. Property records show Cotton purchased the 5,237-square-foot home in April 2004 for \$830,000.

State housing development authority officials have said that Cotton was responsible for more than 400 client vouchers in Washtenaw County, and those cases were re-assigned to other housing agents.

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Michigan Report

December 19, 2005

## **GROUP SAYS MINIMUM WAGE AT NEAR LOW IN BUYING POWER**

Michigan's minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour is effectively worth the same as it was when the wage was last increased in 1997, a study by the Michigan League for Human Services said.

And for a worker working fulltime with no dependents, the \$10,712 a year that the minimum wage would pay a worker barely covers the poverty line, and a worker with two dependents would earn only 67 percent of the poverty line, the study said.

But a spokesperson for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce called release of the study a political act from a group hostile to job providers and trying to "take attention from the fact that Governor Jennifer Granholm is a weak and ineffective leader."

The League for Human Services is an organization that has called on the state to provide greater help to the poor.

Michigan's minimum wage was last raised in 1997 from \$4.25 to \$5.15, and according to the study inflation has eroded the purchasing power of the wage until it is equal to \$4.25 an hour paid before 1997.

According to the study, the minimum wage pays for less effectively than any other year except 1955, and is 32 percent less in real terms than the minimum wage paid in 1968. On an inflation-adjusted basis, the study said, the minimum wage paid in 1968 would be the equivalent of \$7.54 an hour now.

There are now 18 states and the District of Columbia that require a higher minimum wage, and the study argued that boosting the wage actually helps the economy. A number of states with higher minimum wages rank near the bottom of states in terms of unemployment rates, it said.

But Wendy Hofmeyer of the Michigan Chamber said Michigan ranks near the top in terms of unemployment, and other studies have indicated that boosting the minimum wage could result in as much as an 18 percent drop in jobs.

"Now is not the time to bleed more jobs from Michigan," she said.

If the minimum wage should be raised, then it should be done so on a federal basis, Ms. Hofmeyer said.



# Welfare computers cutting aid

**For months, county's new CalWIN system has made errors that hurt vulnerable people.**

*By Judy Lin — Bee Staff Writer*

*Published 2:15 am PST Monday, December 19, 2005*

*Sacramento Bee*

*Story appeared in Metro section, Page B1*

A new welfare computer system - intended to expedite services and reduce fraud - bumped disabled grandmother Linda Bowley to a more expensive Medi-Cal program without ever notifying her. Unable to pay, she went for two months without medical care.

The same system kicked recovering drug addict Danny Mantey off food stamps after he moved. He waited six months for his caseworker to restore the benefit.

Welfare advocates say these are just two out of hundreds of cases being mishandled by computer glitches in the CalWORKS Information Network, which is funded by county, state and federal dollars. The system, known as CalWIN, is a \$744 million automated benefits calculation system being implemented by a consortium of 18 counties, including Sacramento, San Francisco and San Diego.

It's also been maligned by social workers and their unions for being flawed and user unfriendly. Legal aid attorneys have begun pressuring the state to actively monitor the system, and they have even threatened lawsuits over privacy concerns.

County administrators, however, continue to stand by the system and say they expect difficulty any time there's a big change.

"It's like shifting from a Yugo to a Porsche," said Trent Rhorer, executive director of San Francisco's Department of Human Services.

CalWIN was designed by Texas-based Electronic Data Systems Corp. to comply with a 1995 state law to automate welfare systems. The old systems were more than two decades old. Placer was the first small county to pilot the system. while Sacramento was the first large county.

Due to a high volume of cases and many satellite offices, Sacramento County encountered many more problems implementing the program. Last week, caseworkers and welfare attorneys testified before the county's Board of Supervisors that the system is so flawed that it sends notices out in the wrong language, denies benefits to those who should qualify and rejects information put in by workers.

Other problems reported by caseworkers and welfare advocates:

- \* A pregnant woman was unable to visit her doctor.
- \* A Hmong family didn't respond to notices in English and had their benefits cut off when they tried to go to a doctor.
- \* A known abuser was notified of the whereabouts of his family.
- A father caring for his child was denied aid because the system recognized only the mother as the caretaker.
-

While not commenting directly on those allegations, Electronic Data Systems officials have told supervisors to expect some glitches because of the size of the program.

Despite the ongoing trouble, Sacramento County won't receive any additional training or extra staffing, said Bill Ritz, spokesman for Electronic Data Systems.

CalWIN's project manager, Sandra Erbs, did not return several phone messages.

Muriel Johnson was chairwoman of the Board of Supervisors when the county signed the contract with CalWIN in 1999. At the time, county officials believed it was better to get the program earlier rather than later.

Now the opposite is proving true.

San Francisco's Department of Human Services went live with CalWIN last month, and administrators there say they have learned from Sacramento County's mistakes by beefing up staff with 100 additional workers.

Staff wasn't the only expense. Knowing that Electronic Data Systems was on a deadline to roll out CalWIN in other counties, San Francisco dug into its pockets for an extra \$1.7 million for outside help. The county has an \$847,000 contract with Deloitte & Touche for on-site help and an \$811,000 contract with AMBL Consulting Group to train workers, Rhorer said. "It's a trade-off we knew we had to make, because if you're not fully staffed, the problems perpetuate. The clients get frustrated, and the workers get frustrated because the clients are frustrated," he said.

The move will likely put the department over budget. However, administrators hope to achieve savings down the road.

Instead of assigning different caseworkers to different welfare programs, CalWIN is designed to allow one caseworker to handle all of a client's needs, whether it's food stamps, the low-income assistance program known as CalWORKS, or Medi-Cal, low-income medical assistance. The extra work requires staff members to spend more time on each case, but Rhorer says the process will eventually make the department more efficient.

Meanwhile, welfare advocates have been pressuring the state Department of Social Services to take a more active approach.

"We certainly feel the state should have stepped in earlier to monitor the serious problems with the rollout of CalWIN," said Julie Aguilar Rogado, a staff attorney with Legal Services of Northern California for Sacramento County. "We approached them a number of times, and they did end up responding, but we feel they should be directing the counties to administer fixes. It's their obligation in the end."

Shirley Washington, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Social Services, said the state continues to work with Electronic Data Systems and counties.

Grace Galligher, lead attorney with the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organization, said the state has agreed to notify counties that they must send out letters in the client's preferred language.

While mistakes are being fixed, Galligher still considers the system flawed.

Welfare recipients such as Bowley say they have been mistakenly bumped to a more expensive Medi-Cal program without notice. Bowley, a 58-year-old Woodland resident, has never fully recovered from a motorcycle accident, despite three back surgeries.

Instead of \$20 co-payments for medical visits and prescriptions, Bowley was told by her pharmacist that she would have to pay the first \$600 of her medical bills before Medi-Cal coverage kicked in - a tab she couldn't afford with her \$1,200 monthly disability income.

"I've missed several doctor's appointments and a mammogram. And I couldn't get my medicine," she said. "(The caseworker) said it was fixed, but it wasn't; they didn't have me in the computer. It's been horrible."

Bowley contacted Legal Services and was able to get the problem fixed two weeks ago. Mantey, who is now in a Sacramento transitional home, said he had a hard time reaching his caseworker after losing food stamps.

"I kept calling and calling," Mantey said. "She said they had computer problems, and she'd get back to me, and she never did." Legal Services intervened on Mantey's behalf and recovered six months of food stamps for him.

# Give-A-Christmas: Charity's cupboard is bare

By Christy Strawser

Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: December 19, 2005

Troy People Concerned filled 6,500 requests in '05

TROY — Anastasha Lynn practices yoga because as the director of Troy People Concerned she has to find a way to relax.

She also turns off the phone sometimes when she gets home from a long, frustrating day of overwhelming requests for help and little money to go around.

"You really have to focus on what we do accomplish. If you think about what you don't accomplish in a day, it's too heartbreaking," Lynn said. "It's so hard on us. We just go home and do something mindless. You have to let it go."

Troy People Concerned, a Give-A-Christmas Year Around charity, answered a record-breaking 638 requests for assistance in November from families on the cusp of homelessness, single mothers with no heat, seniors without the money to buy the medicine they need to live.

But the charity ran out of money 13 weeks ago.

The group had 6,540 calls for help this year, more than ever before and helped as many people as possible before the cash ran out.

With no money to help, Troy People Concerned staffers refer the desperate to other organizations, help them fill out forms — or sometimes just offer a shoulder to cry on.

Some of the cases stick with the charity staff. Lynn said she remembers a single mother from Rochester who lost her job, had no way to pay the rent and asked if there was anything they could do to keep her off the streets.

"All the shelters are full," Lynn said. "I have no idea what they ended up doing."

But, she added, she has to focus on the positive, like Give-A-Christmas Year Around, to keep the down side in perspective.

"There's always that one family that needs assistance that we're able to help that makes it all worthwhile," Lynn said.

In addition to Troy People Concerned, Give A Christmas will help Common Ground, the Judson Center, HAVEN, the South Oakland Shelter, Community Services of Oakland, the Boys and Girls Club of South Oakland County, South Oakland YMCA and the Salvation Army.

Together, the groups help the homeless, abused women and children, abandoned or foster children, people with emotional or mental impairment, low-income families, even those who've temporarily fallen on hard economic times and need a little boost to get back on their feet.

Give-A-Christmas organizations are all local agencies that help people in this area. Since there are no administrative costs, donations go to the people who need it most.

We would be happy to announce your contributions, along with your city of residence and a greeting or memory.

Checks should be made to "Give-A-Christmas Year Around" and sent to:

Give-A-Christmas

c/o Daily Tribune  
210 E. Third St.  
Royal Oak, MI 48067

Until the end of the year, we'll bring readers stories of Give-A-Christmas' generous donors, along with the agencies and people helped by the charity.

We hope the tales warm hearts this holiday season and spur action on behalf of those who need it the most.

# Charity's success a win for region

Saginaw News Editorial

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

The residents of Saginaw County deserve a tip of the top hat in admiration of their undaunted generosity.

The United Way of Saginaw County exceeded its 2005 campaign goal of \$2.8 million last week - an accomplishment made all more impressive by the demands in the past months. Although United Way set its target slightly lower than in recent years, this year's campaign marks the first time since 2000 that the charity exceeded its goal.

Exceeding the \$2.8 million mark by at least \$100,000 is a testament to the effort of the scores of volunteers and United Way campaign staff, led ably by this year's campaign Chairman Herb A. Spence III and United Way of Saginaw County President Cherrie Benchley. Two dozen business joined in the campaign for the first time and another 30 collected more than they raised for last year's campaign.

Organizers were concerned about the effects of the hurricane and tsunami relief efforts, an anemic economy and doubts in our own backyard with the bankruptcy of Delphi Corp., a major employer and United Way contributor.

But corporations, businesses and individuals in the region stepped up to the challenge to make sure the two dozen United Way-funded agencies, many on bare bones budgets, continue their good works for another year. The 54 initiatives offered by the agencies range from literacy and youth activities such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, to family counseling and feeding the hungry. United Way funded agencies touch about one in three families in our county.

Delphi employees, for obvious reasons, contributed slightly less than last year. But workers at General Motors, Dow, Dow Corning, the Spicer Group, Spence Bros. Construction, Frankenmuth Mutual Insurance and the Saginaw Transit Area Regional System, or STARS, were among the civic-minded organizations that increased their giving.

The Saginaw County community's spirit of giving and generosity remains a point of pride. The success of United Way reveals this community's true character in tough times.

In this season of charity and giving, the community has blessed United Way of Saginaw County.

# Teens' toy drive brightens holidays

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

By Morgan Jarema  
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A pair of Northview High School students got exactly what they wanted for Christmas this year: to make the holidays brighter for needy children.

Emily Obney and Corinn Knuth, both 14, collected more than 300 stuffed animals and distributed them last week to children who are part of the D. A. Blodgett Services for Children & Families Big Brothers/Big Sisters program.

"This is what we wanted," Obney said from behind a folding table overflowing with the toys she and Knuth collected in less than a month from family members, churches and schoolmates. They handed them out at the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Christmas party last week at West Catholic High School.

"It's just about knowing that they got something for Christmas," Knuth said.

Three-year-old Romell, of Grand Rapids, scored Blue, the "Blue's Clues" dog. His brother DeAndre, 8, snagged a squishy snake and a huggable bear. Their other brother, James, 7, clutched a bear of his own.

"I'm gonna name him Mr. P.J.," James said.

Lori Postma, D.A. Blodgett director of development, had received an e-mail last month from the girls asking if they could donate stuffed animals.

The girls explained that they hoped to let the children "know they are not alone in this world," she said.

It was a no-brainer for Postma.

"Normally, we like to give gifts to the children, and we've had other organizations donate bears," she said. "But this really struck me as incredible: Fourteen-year-old girls who want to give something away rather than receive something."

# Giving toys is priceless

## Priceless Gift Toy Store a collaboration to help families this holiday season

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

By Shannon Maynard  
For the Citizen Patriot

For Wendy Wight, organizing the Priceless Gift Toy Store was a chance to give back to the community.

"I have been a single mom with four kids. When I couldn't provide a Christmas for my kids, the community surrounded me," Wight said. "I saw this as a way to express Jesus' love to people in the same situation."

During the past month, The Priceless Gift Toy Store provided Christmas gifts for more than 1,200 children in the city of Jackson.

St. Vincent De Paul partnered with Wight's Together We Can Make a Difference House at 224 W. Wilkins St. St. Vincent's donated the toys.

"I knew there was a mountain of toys that had to get into children's hands," she said.

When John Van Tiem offered the use of a room in the building he owns at 1212 First St. for one month, Wight decided that a free toy store was the best way to distribute the toys.

Through Jackson Public elementary schools and several nonprofits, coupons were passed out to children whose parents could use a little help this holiday season.

And as word spread through the community, more donations were made.

"People heard, and they wanted to contribute," Wight said. "It hooks up with what other people want to do, but haven't started."

More than 50 businesses, churches, schools and organizations joined Wight as she cleaned toys, stocked shelves and manned the store.

"The toys needed to be in the right hands, and that's the hands of the kids," said volunteer Vickie Finley. "There was tons of stuff down there (at St. Vincent De Paul), and it wasn't being used."

Although Wight doesn't know what next year will bring, she is appreciative to those who made the toy store a success.

"It was a huge undertaking, and we did way better than I thought we could do," she said.

Toys remaining after the store closed last week have been given to the Wayne Street Church of Christ for distribution.



# 'Christmas for kids is toys'

By CHERYLL WARREN Argus-Press Staff Writer

*Monday, December 19, 2005 5:11 PM EST*

CORUNNA - For 18 years the Iron Wheels Motorcycle Club of Genesee and Shiawassee counties has ensured that Christmas will be happier for a number of area children in need. The club delivered a large truckload of toys to Shiawassee County Family Court office Saturday. "If you didn't help start this 18 years ago, this wouldn't have gotten off the ground," said IWMC President Clark Bussa, thanking Shiawassee County Family Court Judge James Clatterbaugh.

The effort, known as "Santa's Helping Hands," has grown over the years.

"Back when we started, we didn't have a big room like this," said Bussa. "We brought everything to a broom closet."

This year, bicycles lined the hallway and toys filled the walls of the Family Court office.

Raffles, an auction and canisters around town have all been part of IWMC's drive to raise money to buy toys for Christmas for children who might not receive much otherwise. One supporter, Lear Elsie, raised more than \$2,500 through fundraisers within its own company.

"Christmas for kids is toys," said Bussa. "That's why we do what we can do."

The IWMC effort raised \$4,900. Saturday, 13 members of the club went shopping at Wal-Mart, which helped the effort by giving a 20 percent discount for all the purchases the club made. From the store, toys were loaded onto a semi-truck donated by DUX Boats. When the truck arrived at the county courts and public health building to deliver the toys, it was filled with bicycles and boxes of smaller goodies.

"With the economy and the bad times this year, you've gone above and beyond the call of duty. This is phenomenal," said Clatterbaugh.

One area youngster, Lee Stevenson, heard about the effort. He had won a bicycle at school and was given another one by his parents for Christmas. He donated one of his bicycles to Santa's Helping Hands, bringing the bike over to the courthouse as Christmas gift for another child.

Club members left the courthouse with rounds of "See you next year."

# Quilters again answer call to help kids at Christmas

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

By Rick Wilson  
The Grand Rapids Press

Susan Cronheim and Ruth Newell, co-chairwomen of the West Michigan Quilters Guild, don't wait around to be asked for help every year.

As if it was on automatic pilot, the 365-member group just sets about its business every holiday season making garments and blankets and quilts as Christmas gifts for West Michigan's neediest children.

This year, the group donated a record 425 miniature quilts and dolls to go with them to the Santa Claus Girls annual gift-giving effort, which culminated Saturday when presents were delivered.

"They really bailed us out," said Barbara Bowe, the Press-sponsored charity's president.

"Because of the economy and what it's done to some of the families, people were really in need this year."

The Santa Claus Girls delivered gifts this year to 11,284 needy children from 4,616 families -- the most since 1993 when 5,079 families were served. Bowe said the record is 5,905 families in 1990.

"We had one woman call who was crying because her husband had just left her because of money problems and she didn't know what she was going to do," Bowe said. "She was sobbing so hard it was difficult to get the children's names."

"Another woman said her husband had filled out more than 100 job applications and hadn't gotten a single response," Bowe added. "It's bad out there."

Cronheim said the Quilters annual effort was spurred by a woman in Muskegon who put out the call at a fabric shop where she works. That drew more than 100 sets of quilts and dolls, which put the group well over its goal of 300.

"That really busted our quota," Cronheim said. "One woman, from scratch, made two Raggedy Ann dolls. They're really works of art."

The quilts and dolls went to some of the 5,583 girls who received gifts this year.

Cash donations to the Santa Claus Girls will be accepted through the holiday season. Mail them to Santa Claus Girls, c/o The Grand Rapids press, 155 Michigan St. NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Names of contributors will appear in The Press, so please double check for correct spellings.

To contribute by credit card, call 222-5796 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays.

# Students help keep residents warm at Florence Crittenton

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

By Jaclyn Roeschke  
jroeschke@citpat.com -- 768-4945

Local mothers and their children will keep warm this winter with fleece blankets made by students at Michigan Center Junior and Senior High School.

The school's special-education class cut and tied fleece to create 21 blankets for residents at Florence Crittenton Services, a Jackson-based organization that houses young mothers and their children.

The blankets were completed as a vocational training project for the students, said teacher Ruthann Cutshaw.

"I usually try to keep one class period a day for doing something (other than lesson plans), and this year I decided to do crafts with the students during that period," she said.

"The vocational training is done because we want to get the kids ready for a job. Completing tasks, following directions and getting along with people you work with -- those are all necessary skills you have to have to get a job."

The blankets were made by cutting fringes on two square pieces of fleece, then tying the ends together. Cutshaw said students picked out the color combinations they wanted to use, and had to learn how to follow her directions to tie the blankets.

Not only were the students getting a chance to do some job training, but Cutshaw said the project allowed her class to help others in the area.

"I just thought this was a cool thing because a lot of times people don't get a chance to give," she said. "This was our way of giving back to the community and doing something nice."

Residents at Florence Crittenton Services had smiles on their faces when they received the blankets, said Tammy Ratz, executive deputy director of the residence.

The home provides temporary shelter and counseling programs for girls younger than 20 and who are wards of the court. All girls in the program are either pregnant or have a child.

"They were surprised and excited to get the blankets, and this is something that they can take with them when they leave," Ratz said. "We were all very touched that other youth wanted to reach out and touch youth who were less fortunate than them. It was awesome."

# Students learn joy of giving to others

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

By Kym Reinstadler  
The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- Santa's elves were busy this morning delivering gifts and enough food for a holiday feast to five local families who are down on their luck.

Twenty elves -- who also represent their classes in Great Lakes Elementary School's Student Council -- took a West Ottawa Public Schools bus, because Santa's sleigh is in the shop getting a tune-up for this weekend.

"This is very exciting," said Alysa Hernandez, 9, of David Stafanich's fourth-grade class. "I can't wait to see their faces."

Whose faces?

"Our faces as we take things in," Alysa said. "We'll be able to say, 'I did this.' We're helping people out. "

Counselor Ann Harris, who advises the student council along with fifth-grade teacher Jeremy Andrews, said the annual event teaches children that giving is at least as fun as receiving -- and sometimes more.

Great Lakes' four classes at each grade level combined to adopt a family through the Salvation Army. Kindergartens were combined with another grade that chose a big family to benefit. Students brought in money that was used to buy a gift for every member of the family from a shopping list they generated. Students also brought in fresh and nonperishable foods. Leftover money was used to buy hams and turkeys.

Despite other charity needs, such as tsunami and hurricane relief, Great Lakes families donated as much money and significantly more food to this holiday giving project than last year, Harris said.

Teachers did the shopping, but the task of wrapping the gifts and boxing up the food fell to the student council.

As their wrapping workshop came to a close, Harris reminded students of good visiting elf etiquette: don't let the pet out as you come in; ask if they'd like the gifts under the Christmas tree or someplace else; say "you're welcome"; it's OK to let the lady of the house give you a little hug if she wants to.

"We raised about \$1,000 in the fall for Hurricane Katrina relief, but this is better because the students can see the effects of their giving," Harris said. "Giving is a thrill."

# Christmas is time for volunteer to shine

BY KRISTINA HUGHES NEWS-REVIEW STAFF WRITER

*Monday, December 19, 2005 3:01 PM EST*

CHARLEVOIX - Mary Helen Riggle is known as Charlevoix's Mrs. Claus.

When many people are enjoying their summer vacations, Riggle is collecting Christmas toys and handling budgets to plan for the Charlevoix Community Christmas project's giving tradition.

"I even have a bedroom downstairs dedicated to the project," Riggle said, of the room often overflowing with stuffed animals and toys she collects annually.

At 89, Riggle's contagious, youthful energy is part of the spirit that has made the project a tradition for 23 years.

"It's my retirement job," Riggle said, of her work with the project and the Charlevoix Food Pantry.

The Charlevoix Community Christmas project was founded in 1982 by Riggle and the late Lucille Martin. The project grew out of the Clothesline project, a room in the First Congregational Church where people donated free clothes to community members. Through their efforts at the church, the friends were in contact with families in need, and they delivered baskets with Christmas dinners and gifts. As the needs grew, the project moved out of the First Congregational Church where bags were originally packed in pews. For years, the group collected items at the VFW hall.

During the 1980s, a middle school teacher challenged his students to bring items. The classrooms competed, collecting more than 500 cans of food. For years, the St. Mary Catholic Church has helped out with a giving tree, where members of the congregation can help fill community wishes.

On Saturday, volunteers gave baskets and gifts, dinners, hats, gloves and toys to close to 170 families and more than 300 Charlevoix area children. The baskets also included a certificate for fresh fruit compliments of Oleson's and the book, "On That Christmas Night" donated by the Ministerial Association.

Last week, Riggle was front and center sharing her joy for giving.

Ladies decked out in their holiday sweaters were busy as elves collecting the toys and food. The volunteers look to their own Mrs. Claus - Riggle - to run the Christmas campaign.

"She's doing something right, because people keep giving her money," Beverly Boss said.

Boss said it's addicting to volunteer.

"It's very rewarding for us, we keep coming back," Boss said.

Riggle's devotion to the project is remembered in a scrapbook full of old newspaper clippings, a few thank you letters and fading schedules and lists from the 1980s. Riggle smiles as she scans the old pictures and clippings.

Through the years, Riggle has forged memorable friendships, "I have close friends, my friends are loyal and are people who care about their community," Riggle said. "I'm sorry that it grows every year, but if the need is there, we're trying to fill it," she said.

"Helen's important to the project. She brings her enthusiasm. She knows everybody in town and can twist their arms to help," Rosemary Horton said with a laugh.

"I just keep hanging around," Riggle said "I enjoy all these people I meet."

Boss jokes about Riggle's famous knack for bringing in volunteers.

"Don't trust that sweet little face, because she gets you roped in," Boss said in jest.

But Diane Coolman did when Riggle asked for her help. She and her husband, John, showed up last year, and the couple has returned this year.

"We're touched by the community and the people who donated," Diane said. "It made my Christmas to see the community come together to help people."

Coolman said Riggle's devotion to the project represents the true holiday spirit.

"She's just so sweet and I hope I can be like her some day and live as many years as she has and have that energy she has," Coolman said. "It's a gift."

Kristina Hughes can be reached at 439-9348, or [khughes@petoskeynews.com](mailto:khughes@petoskeynews.com).

Detroit Free Press

December 20, 2005

## Tax help offered to needy families

A **Detroit**-based nonprofit is seeking volunteers for its 29th season of helping low-income families prepare their income taxes to qualify for much-needed refunds and credits.

Last year, volunteers from the Accounting Aid Society helped more than 6,900 low-income households in metro Detroit to receive an average tax refund of \$849.

For low-income recipients, receiving tax refunds is a crucial source of income, perhaps paying for badly needed groceries or helping to defray high winter utility bills, said Rebecca Basham, operations coordinator for the Society's Tax Assistance Program. It's considered the third-largest such program in the nation, she said last week.

Volunteers need not be accountants. They will be trained in tax-preparation workshops starting in January at eight local colleges, then help taxpayers at 30 locations around Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Livingston counties. Volunteers can register at [www.accountingaidsociety.org](http://www.accountingaidsociety.org) or call 313-647-9620, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays.

*By Bill Laitner*

December 20, 2005

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE: \$1.7 million awarded to assistance programs**

A program to prevent childhood obesity and another that teaches martial-arts skills to at-risk **Detroit** Public Schools students are among the recipients of \$1.7 million in grants announced this week by the Jewish Fund, which was created in 1997 from proceeds of the sale of Sinai Hospital.

City Year in Detroit received \$285,000 over three years to develop the obesity prevention program in Detroit Public Schools. The Jewish Fund also gave City Year its 2005 Robert Sosnick Award for Excellence, recognizing the work it does to inspire young people to do community service. Members have volunteered in the schools for six years as tutors.

The Jewish Community Council/Kids Kicking Cancer received \$100,000 to continue the martial-arts program. Some of the other recipients include:

Michigan AIDS Fund: \$25,000 for one year to develop a new public engagement initiative.

United Way for Southeastern Michigan: \$50,000 for one year to support the new 2-1-1 resource line.

DMC/Sinai-Grace Hospital: \$100,000 to buy new beds and monitors for the Nephrology Department, \$100,000 to buy a digital mobile imaging system for use in vascular surgery and \$67,400 to purchase three infant ventilators.

New Detroit: \$90,000 over two years to develop a program to enhance relationships among emerging black, Jewish and other minority leaders, in conjunction with the Jewish Community Council.

*By Julie Edgar*





JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW  
DIRECTOR

## News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

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### **Lisa Brewer Walraven appointed federal liaison and policy advisor**

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**December 20, 2005**

Michigan Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow today announced the **appointment of Lisa Brewer Walraven of East Lansing to the position of federal liaison and policy advisor** for the department. She replaces Kristen McDonald, who left to become chief of staff with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The appointment was effective Nov. 28.

"I am pleased to add Lisa to our management team," Udow said. "Her administrative and educational background in early childhood development will help as the department move forward in those areas."

Udow said Brewer Walraven's duties include:

- Directing activities of the DHS Office of Federal Liaison and Public Policy.
- Developing a federal legislative and policy development strategy.
- Coordinating federal policy and legislative issues with Gov. Granholm's Washington, D.C. office.
- Advising the director on early childhood education and care issues affecting the department.
- Staff liaison between the Early Childhood Investment Corporation and the department.
- Supporting activities of the Governor's Children's Cabinet.

"Lisa will work through Michigan's Great Start System and the Governor's Children's Cabinet to develop and implement policies that protect children and families and help them be successful and self-sufficient."

Since 2001 Brewer-Walraven has been an administrator for Lansing-based Michigan 4C Association, a statewide organization that supports child day care providers across the state. There she implemented the statewide T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Michigan project and performed a broad range of managerial duties.

From 1994-2001 she worked for a variety of child day care programs and as head teacher at Michigan State University's preschool partnership where she implemented a Head Start program. She has been a child development and growth instructor at Lansing Community College since 1998. Brewer-Walraven holds a master's degree in childhood development from MSU granted in 1997.

**For more information on the Department of Human Services go to [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs)**

**For more information on the Great Start System go to [www.greatstartforkids.org/](http://www.greatstartforkids.org/)**